DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 612 SO 028 885

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TITLE National Decision Making during the Holocaust. Romania and Bulgaria: A Study in Contrasts. Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad, 1997. (Romania and Bulgaria).
SPONS AGENCY Center for International Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 14p.; For other documents in the 1997 program, see SO 028 883-890.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anti Semitism; Fascism; Foreign Countries; High Schools; *Jews; Judaism; Justice; Nationalism; Nazism; Political Attitudes; Political Science; Social Bias; Social Discrimination; Social Studies; World Affairs; *World War II
IDENTIFIERS Bulgaria; *Holocaust; Romania

ABSTRACT

This one-week intensive study is intended for use within a one semester course focusing on the Holocaust and human behavior for the upper level high school student. The unit examines the history of Romania and Bulgaria, especially during Nazi occupation in World War II. Students explore the decisions of each nation and the impact they had on the lives of the citizens. Students research the two countries to determine how the Jews were treated during the Holocaust and the way in which national decisions were made and implemented. (EH)

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ED 420 612

FULBRIGHT

National Decision Making during the Holocaust.

Romania and Bulgaria: A Study in Contrasts.
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(Romania and Bulgaria)

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NATIONAL DECISION MAKING DURING THE HOLOCAUST

ROMANIA AND BULGARIA

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

A mini-study unit by
Carolyn B. Schindler for
1997 Romania-Bulgaria
Fulbright Summer Seminar
for Teachers

NATIONAL DECISION MAKING BETWEEN THE YEARS 1918 AND 1946

ROMANIA AND BULGARIA

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

This one week intensive study is intended for use within a one semester course called THE HOLOCAUST AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR. Offered to juniors and seniors in high school, this elective course examines not only the events of the Holocaust, but the reasons which led to its development. Much of the focus of the course is on individuals and their behavior. We study victims, victimizers, bystanders, and resisters. We read memoirs of people who lived through those years to analyze and compare the decisions they made and the reasons for them.

I went on the Romania-Bulgaria Fulbright with the idea of investigating the Holocaust as it manifested itself in each country, but I soon learned that my quest was not going to be easy. In Romania first, I found no one who would or could talk about the Holocaust. I was even told to change my topic, that the research had not yet been done. I located only one synogogue which was not open, nor could I tell if it still functioned. I learned of one person who had sheltered a Jewish friend, but I was able to interview no one. The lack of information was discouraging. It certainly was true that the economic situation today is so bleak that people give all their attention to survival, and that life under the Communist dictator Ceaucescu was so restricted that perhaps no study had been done.

However, Bulgaria proved just the opposite. People there seemed proud of their national role in the Holocaust, and they bragged that not one Jew had been given up to Germany's genocidal plans. I visited a functioning synogogue in Sofia and learned about Jewish history in Bulgaria before, during, and after the war. I also interviewed two elderly women, one Jewish, one Gentile, about the war years. Even though present economic conditions are perhaps even more bleak that those in Romania, people were not reluctant to discuss what happened during the war. There is no sense of national shame over what happened to Bulgarian citizens of any religious or ethnic origin.

While in Romania and Bulgaria, it occurred to me that not only individuals but nations make decisions which have a profound impact on their citizens, that national decision making is even more complicated and intricate than individual decision making. Romania and Bulgaria are two eastern European countries about which little is known in the United States. What happened in those two countries in the years leading up to the war as well as the reasons for the national decisions made and actions taken before, during and after the war should prove to American students that there are no simple answers to the WHYS of history, that predictions of what might have, could have, and should have happened often prove wrong in the face of the realities of war.

NATIONAL DECISION MAKING DURING THE HOLOCAUST

ROMANIA AND BULGARIA

IN-CLASS RESEARCH PROJECT
How much can you learn in 60 minutes?

For the purposes of this project, you have selected one of two eastern European countries involved in World War II - Bulgaria or Romania. Right now you probably know very little about either country. Today we will be seeking answers to questions related to the decisions made in each of these countries before, during and after World War II. By working together, members of each group should be able to find out a great deal about one country and teach it to the students in the other group.

DIRECTIONS: As you look up answers to the following questions, record both the answer and the source of the answer on your chart.

1. <u>Location</u>: Where is Bulgaria/Romania? What are its borders? How big is the country? Has the size of the country or its borders changed at all in the 20th century? Where is the country located in relation to the Germany of 1940?

2. <u>Pre-World War II History</u>: On which side did Bulgaria/Romania serve in World War I? Why? What happened as the result of that decision?

3. <u>Government</u>: What kind of government did Bulgaria/Romania have in the years between the wars?

4. <u>Economy:</u> Find out all you can about basis of the economy in each country just before World War II. What were each country's natural resources? Had these countries been affected by the Great Depression?

5. Religion and Ethnicity: Which religions were practiced in each country? Which ethnic groups existed in each country? Was there a history of tolerance or intolerance between religious and ethnic groups?

6. Relations with Hitler's Germany: Once Hitler came to power in Germany, how did relations between Bulgaria/Romania and Germany change, if at all? Describe the relations with Germany in the years between 1933 and 1939.

7. World War II: On which side did Bulgaria/Romania participate in the war? Why? Was it by choice or by conquest? Was there any alternative?

8. Military actions: Did each country have an army or a navy? If so, what were they used for? Where did they serve? What happened within each country during the war? Were there military or civilian casualties? Was there any fighting? Was there any property damage? Who inflicted it?

9. Holocaust actions: Were any religious or ethnic groups singled out for "special treatment"? Which? by whom? What happened?

10. At the close of World War II in Europe: On which side was Bulgaria/Romania? What were the results?

11. Since World War II: Summarize the history of each country since 1945. Include what you can about government, economy, population, boundaries.

12. Today - 1997: boundaries, population (including religious and ethnic groups), government, and economy. What, in your estimation, has been the legacy of the past fifty years?

While you probably won't be able to find answers to all questions in the time allotted, your group should be able to find most of them by dividing up the work and consulting the following classroom sources:

1996 World Almanac
Atlas of the Holocaust
Encyclopedia of the Holocaust
Encyclopedia of the Third Reich
Holocaust CDRom
Resource Book from Facing History
Romania CDRom
Classroom encyclopedias and reference books

Assignment for next class: In an essay, summarize what you learned about Bulgaria/Romania and the decisions made by each nation before, during, and after World War II. Would different decisions have been possible? Would different decisions have resulted in changes today?

BULGARIA	ROMANIA
Note Sources for all answers	
Location / Geography / Boundaries	Location / Geography / Boundaries
2) World War I history	World War I history
3) Government - between wars	Government - between wars
4) Economy before WW II	Economy before WW II
5) Religious and Ethnic Groups	Religious and Ethnic Groups
6) Relations with Germany between 1933 - 1939	Relations with Germany between 1933-1939

BULGARIA	ROMANIA
(1) World War II Participation - which side & why?	(1) World War II Participation, which side & why?
(2) Military Participation/Action	(2) Military Participation/Action
(9) Holocaust Actions/Reactions	(9) Holocaust Actions
(10) At the end of the war	(10) At the end of the war
(11) Since WW II	(11) Since WW II
(12) Today - Legacy of War?	(12) Today - Legacy of War?

Genocide Chart WW II

Country	Jewish Pop. Sept. 1939	Jewish Losses	% of Jewish Losses
1. Poland	3,300,000	2,800,000	85
2. USSR occupied territory	2,100,000	1,500,000	71.4
3. Rumania	850,000	425,000	50
4. Hungary	404,000	200,000	49.5
5. Czechoslovakia	315,000	260,000	82.5
6. France	300,000	90,000	30
7. Germany	210,000	170,000	81
8. Lithuania	150,000	135,000	90
9. Netherlands	150,000	90,000	60
10. Latvia	95,000	85,000	89.5
11. Yugoslavia	75,000	55,000	73.3
12. Greece	75,000	60,000	80

13.	Austria	60,000	40,000	66.2
14.	Italy	57,000	15,000	26.3
15.	Bulgaria	50,000	7,000	14
16.	Others	20,000	6,000	30
	Totals	8,301,000	5,978,000	72%

Note: In WW II, approximately 11 million civilians were killed of whom 6 million were Jewish. Of those 6 million approximately 2½ million were children

6 "death" camps were in Poland. Why?

Auschwitz-Birkenau
Chelmno
Treblinka
Sobibor
Belzec
Majdanek

SARAH ISAK LEVY: Gleanings from an Interview

On July 19, 1997, I interviewed Mrs. Levy at her daughter's apartment in Sofia, Bulgaria, where she is now living since her husband died. Her daughter, Clara, is married and lives in the apartment with her husband. They have no children. The following paragraphs are a summary of what I learned from that interview.

Mrs. Levy was born in 1915 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, which makes her 82 this year. Her father came from Svilengrad, on the border with Turkey; her mother was from Stara Zagora in Bulgaria. She still has some relatives in Turkey, but others have moved to the US. One sister and one brother died in Israel, but another sibling still lives there. She herself didn't emigrate to Israel when she had a chance after the war because of a sister who was married to a Bulgarian and couldn't leave. Also, her husband hesitated to leave and start a new life because they had two small children. Until her recent move to her daughter's apartment in Sofia, Mrs. Levy had always lived in the center of Plovdiv where there is a Jewish quarter, typical of old Bulgarian towns, she says, not a ghetto.

During the war, she recalled, the lives of Jewish people were restricted in many ways. There were curfews, and all Jews had to wear the yellow star. In fact, they could not leave the house without wearing the star, but they were happy that they could be together. Mrs. Levy had a baby in 1941, a girl. She had to make a list of all her belongings for the government. Because she omitted a cupboard from the list, and this omission was discovered, she had to pay a fine three times the cost of that cupboard. In 1942, even their radio was taken. After the radio was taken, the people next door, who were not Jewish, turned up their radio so that the Levys could also hear it. However, Radio London and Radio Moscow were banned. Even typewriters were confiscated by the government, but after 1944, the typewriters were returned.

The worst thing that happened to Mrs. Levy was that her husband was forced to go to a labor camp six months of every year, from May to November of 1940 to 1944. (This labor camp, where Jews were forced to work, was called LABOR ENJOY.) While he was away, she would take her baby daughter and move back in with her parents who also lived in Plovdiv. When her husband came home for the winter, they would move back to their home. Mrs Levy showed me photographs of her husband taken at the labor camp. These old black and white photos showed a handsome man with shirt off, flexing his muscles for the camera. The tone of the photos was light hearted; the men looked as if they were at a summer camp training for some athletic event.

While her husband was away, Mrs. Levy worked in a shoe and clothing manufacturing plant. Her parents took care of her brother's child and her child.

Bulgaria was occupied by Germans during the war, even though Bulgaria sided with Germany. German soldiers lived in people's houses. Mrs. Levy had to serve them. The Germans convinced Bulgarian nationalists that Bulgaria would be given Dobrudja and Macedonia in return for its alliance with Germany. The Bulgarian army was then ordered to occupy Macedonia in order to

free the German soldiers stationed there to go to the eastern front. Soldiers in the Bulgarian army did not serve at the front.

In 1942, bombing started, even in Plovdiv. American bombers from Italy were sent to bomb the Romanian oil fields, and if they had any bombs left over, on their way back to Italy, they would drop the bombs on Bulgaria. Everyone in Bulgaria had to dig bomb shelters. The police came to check that this was done. People at the railway station were killed when it was bombed because military equipment was stored there. Big holes were created by the bombs. People in hiding places were also killed. A church in Plovdiv was bombed. Even though they had been told not to go out, young people did anyway and sometimes they were captured and killed.

According to Mrs. Levy, her daughter, and her daughter's husband, who is not Jewish, Bulgaria had a long tradition of tolerance among different ethnic groups. Clara's husband's grandparents, who were teachers, lived in a house which belonged to Jews and they had "excellent relations - like brothers." All their holidays were observed together.

The Bulgarian politicians, the country's ruling class, were not pro-German, according to Mrs. Levy and her daughter. However, there was strong nationalistic fervor among young people, and several pro-Fascist organizations sprang up. They wore brown uniforms, a gift from the state. They marched in the streeets and shouted, giving the Nazi salute. Mrs. Levy said these organizations had the attraction of "hoopla" and were like a game. Another organization which was for adults was called the Bulgarian Legion. Its philosophy was "Clean nation."

However, everyday relations between people were not "organizational or idealogical." Human relationships were much stronger. And the majority of people were not attracted by nationalism. Often, wealthy people helped the Jews, many of whom were clerks for wealthy Bulgarians.

Before the war, a German Jew named Josef _____ had been the best specialist in Constitutional rights. He was not a Communist. However, he had to leave the Parliament under laws restricting Jewish participation in government.

In Macedonia, 11,000 former Bulgarian Jews lived in land occupied by the Bulgarian army. Most of those Jews were sent to concentration camps in Poland. Mrs. Levy remembers their passing through Bulgaria on trains. The Germans had wanted all the Jews, including those living in Bulgaria, sent to concentration camps, but the Bulgarian czar Boris did not agree because of resistance on the part of the people. In 1943, the German army was defeated at Stalingrad, a turning point in the war. The ruling class was wondering about their future. To satisfy the German demand for Jews, the 11,000 Jews living in Macedonia were sacrificed. (From another source I learned that only four of these 11,000 Jews - who were sent to Auschwitz - survived.)

Mrs. Levy said her greatest fear during the war occurred when an alarm would go off because of potential bombing, and she would have to leave work to run to her child. She was aware of the possibility that if she were caught, she might also be sent to the camps.

Rich Jewish people in Plovdiv always complained about conditions. They gave money voluntarily to police and politicians to help them if they were sent away. However, no Jews from Bulgaria proper were ever sent out of the country to concentration camps.

In Sept., 1944, Bulgaria switched sides. For eight months Bulgarian soldiers fought against the Germans. Many were killed. Jewish boys volunteered to go and fight against the Germans. In Sept. 44, condensed milk and chocolate from Americans in Greece, was distributed to all.

When the war was over, everyone was crying.

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This interview was difficult for several reasons. Mrs. Levy's words had to be translated to me. I had a woman with me to do the translating while I took notes. Clara Levy and her husband also answered the questions. They spoke English. Sometimes three or four people were talking at the same time, some in English, the rest in Bulgarian. Then they would start arguing with each other or correcting each other or adding some information. I wrote as fast as I could, but undoubtably I made many mistakes or omissions. I did not tape this interview which was just as well as the voices would have been garbled.

However, in the one hour I spent with Mrs. Levy and her daughter and son-in-law, I learned a great deal about life in Bulgaria during World War II, especially for Jews. I wish I could ask her some more questions. I did take a photo of Mrs. Levy (see attached). I will never forget her.